

TESTIMONY OF REPRESENTATIVE HEATHER WILSON
BEFORE OF HOUSE RESOURCES COMMITTEE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, RECREATION AND PUBLIC LANDS
ON H.R. 3258 – THE HIBBEN CENTER ACT

9/14/2004 - Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to be here to support H.R. 3258, the Hibben Center Act.

For six centuries, massive prehistoric structures lay untouched in a remote area of northwestern New Mexico. Chaco Canyon was the home of many indigenous southwestern peoples from between A.D. 850 and 1250. The Pueblo peoples of New Mexico, the Hopi of Arizona, and the Navajo consider Chaco Canyon to be part of their ancestral homelands.

In recognition of its significance, President Theodore Roosevelt designated Chaco Canyon a national monument in 1907 and Congress changed the park's designation to a national historical park in 1980.

The University of New Mexico (UNM) has participated in exploring, preserving, and documenting Chaco Canyon's extensive archeological sites since Chaco Canyon National Monument was founded in 1907. In 1949, UNM deeded its lands in Chaco Canyon National Monument to the United States Government in exchange for continued rights to conduct scientific research in the area. Since then, UNM and the National Park Service (NPS) have been partners in researching and preserving the Chaco Canyon collection.

H.R. 3258 is an authorization bill, allowing the NPS to spend money away from Park Service lands for this collection. Specifically, this bill will allow the Park Service to design and construct a museum, storage facility, and workspace in the Hibben Archeological Research Center on the University of New Mexico campus in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Funding for this project has already been appropriated in the National Park Service Line Item Construction Program 5-year budget, for funding in FY 2006. This project will require no additional or new money from Congress.

Continuing the longstanding relationship with UNM, the shell of the Hibben Center and academic spaces have already been built by UNM with an area unfinished for the Park Service to build out for its Chaco Collection if Congress authorizes it.

Additionally, there will be no ongoing operational costs for the Park Service because UNM has agreed to be responsible for 100% of the ongoing utilities, maintenance, and operation costs associated with the project.

Over 1.5 million artifacts excavated from Chaco Canyon are stored at UNM. Unfortunately, they are currently housed in three substandard facilities that have water pipes that leak on the collection; inadequate or non-existent security and fire protection

systems; and no environmental controls. In one instance, the tin roofing was blown off a storage facility exposing artifacts to leaking tar.

A primary component of the project is to create a single storage facility for the artifacts that will provide enhanced security, environmental controls such as proper temperature and humidity levels, and a fire detection and suppression system. In addition to storing the Chaco Canyon collection, the Hibben Center will provide Chacoan descendants, researchers, and students a single location from which to access artifacts, archives, and data collections.

In closing, I would like to thank UNM Vice Provost for Research Terry Yates for making the trip here to testify today. I also want to thank Chairman Pombo and Subcommittee Chairman Radanovich for holding this hearing. I look forward to working with the committee to address any concerns it may have with this bill so that the National Park Service and the UNM can move forward with this important project.